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ABSTRACT

The scope, rationale, staff, and instructional methods of the University of California at Los Angeles (U.C.L.A.) reading program are described. U.C.L.A. students come mainly from the upper level of high-school graduates and in college may have very demanding work loads. Consequently, the reading and study center has based its policies on student needs. The staff has a diversity of backgrounds and thus can help students in many academic problem areas. There is an individual interview instead of a formal reading test, and improvement is determined by ability to handle current course readings. Reading classes consist of a 3-week group concerned with techniques for efficient and rapid reading, while 6-week classes work on development of skills and/or the completion of set reading goals. Seven questions concerning the instructional methods at U.C.L.A. are stated and answered: for example, (1) How do you accommodate to differences in comprehension skills? (2) How do you encourage an awareness of the organizational patterns of writing? and (3) What do you do to promote rapid reading? (DF)

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INSTRUCTIONAL METHODS FOR READING GROUPS AT U.C.L.A. READING AND STUDY CENTER

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by

Margaret M. Wilson

This paper is addressed to both beginning and experienced reading and study counselors in college, university, and junior college reading and study programs and is written in the spirit of sharing the results of our efforts in the field of reading and study at U.C.L.A. It is our hope that a description of the scope and rationale of our program and staff, and a discussion of the instructional methods in reading groups may help to stimulate ideas which may be helpful in other settings.

The U.C.L.A. Student

An appreciation and understanding of both the scope of our work and of the instructional methods we use in our reading groups can only be attained by some awareness of our university and of the Reading and Study Center setting. As part of the University of California system, U.C.L.A. accepts for admission only students with approximately a B+ grade point average in required college entrance courses. This amounts to the upper 12½ per cent of the graduating seniors of the high schools.

Thus the bulk of our students come from the upper level of the high school graduates; however, the diversity in competence that we see among our students stems from differences of grading standards in high schools and from the number of junior college transfers who enter the university at the junior year. Though the latter must present at least a 2.49 grade point average for their lower division work, the instructional approaches in their junior colleges usually differ from those in the university. As a result, many students are not prepared for the sophisticated level of course work and for the rigors of the ten week quarter system.

Demands of U.C.L.A. Courses

The quantity and quality of the work load for the ten week term present problems for many students; moreover, they feel sharply the necessity of maintaining at least a 1.5 grade point average to prevent the very real prospect of dismissal from the university. It was when we became aware of changes in the demands in courses in the social science fields and the humanities that we realized that our earlier presentation of various study systems was not relevant. We found, for example, that most U.C.L.A. history and political science courses no longer depend upon a single text, but use two or three major writers in the field for core reading, with an additional eight to ten books as necessary enrichment. A fifteen hundred page reading requirement for the quarter is typical. The student's task is to integrate and synthesize the ideas and substantiating facts from these readings with the material on the lectures. He must establish a point of view and support it with evidence in a number of essay questions in a three hour examination. In short, he must think like an historian or a political scientist, etcetera.

(PAPER TO BE DISCUSSED AT IRA SEMINAR, MAY 1970)

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Rationale for Reading and Study Center at U.C.L.A.

In summary, then, the U.C.L.A. student who comes to the Reading and Study Center is intellectually able but may be dissatisfied with his performance. His needs may include the development of skills to handle a large volume of material at a sophisticated level, an understanding of the anxieties which inhibit him, a need for reassurance and recovery of confidence in his own abilities, and a focus on his assumption of responsibility for himself.

Reading and Study Center Staff

To meet this range of needs it is appropriate that the Reading and Study Center be a part of the Student Counseling Center. Our chief asset is our staff of fourteen (some part-time) highly motivated and involved counselors with a wide diversity of backgrounds. Of these fourteen, one is a math-science specialist who confines his work to those areas. Four bring a specialization in writing skills to amplify their regular reading and study work. The considerable remedial experience of one makes her invaluable with the group of two hundred fifty special-entry students. The other eight come with backgrounds in anthropology, psychology, sociology, history, and English, plus a wide variety of experience. This diversity of staff is almost indispensable in meeting the wide range of academic problems and in accommodating the diverse concerns of our students as we work with them individually and in groups.

Reading Groups Seen in Perspective

To understand the construction of our reading groups and our rationale for them it is important to keep in mind that a student entering the Reading and Study Center may immediately see a counselor regarding any reading or study problem, and has the opportunity to make subsequent individual appointments. For those interested in groups, we offer programs in writing, study skills, special reading interests, and examination preparation, as well as those groups developed particularly for the special-entry students.

The plan of the reading groups represents our adjustment to some of the realities of our situation. Since work in the Reading and Study Center brings no credit, grade, or recognition, a student must weigh the value of our service against the other conflicting demands upon his time. We have determined our procedures in the light of this time limitation. We do no formal testing, but substitute the individual interview to establish level of competence.

Policy of No Formal Reading Test

This individual interview is our version of the Pre-Test. What we want to establish is whether the student understands the material in his course reading and is maintaining a "C" average. We also hope to ascertain that he is not currently involved in an emotional crisis. The result of this "screening" does not mean that we have a homogeneous reading group. Our reality has been that among our group of reasonably competent readers we may have four graduate students, one of whom is currently working on his doctoral dissertation, a foreign student for whom English is his third language, two entering freshmen, two seniors majoring in English, two Engineering students, etcetera. The question might be asked, why don't you assign students to groups in order to produce homogeneity? The answer is that we must accommodate to the pattern of the students' other classes. This is why we offer groups at a variety of times so a student can fit one into his schedule. The academic schedule is set first and is the reason we cannot begin our reading group work until the second week of

the quarter.

The Post-Test is some tangible evidence of the student's improved ability to effectively handle his current course readings and an indication that he will continue to operate efficiently. This may be revealed in different ways. "I don't know what's happened, but I'm getting eight hours sleep for the first time this quarter, and I'm getting my reading done." "I'm really making great strides on the research for my thesis in Public Administration." "I used to hear my friends talking about books I had no time to read -- I have time now." "I understand what the author is doing. I see his pattern of thought."

Adaptation of Instructional Methods for Three and Six Week Reading Groups

Three Week Group

The three reading groups deal with techniques for efficient and rapid reading which are aimed at producing such results as cited above. All are limited to fifteen students. One runs its twice weekly ninety minute sessions for three weeks. We justify this length of time since we know from experience that all of the reading techniques we know can be presented and experienced in that period of time. The internalization of these techniques, however, must be done by the student on his own. Many of our students are able to do this and prove it when they return later to show an "A" on a history final, for example.

Six Week Groups

The other groups run for six weeks. The additional period for one is planned to accommodate the slower student who needs that time to develop his skills. The length of the other is set for the development of skills necessary to accomplish the tangible goal that has been set at the first meeting of the group. This goal is to read and study during one group session of the sixth week a complete book similar in length and caliber to the type that appears on course reading lists. The accomplishment of this goal provides significant evidence to the student of his ability to cope with the university reading demands.

There must be great adaptation of instructional methods in the conduct of the six week group. As the group approaches its fourth week the counselor will anticipate the absence of a number of students who will be taking midterms. The fifth week will see the return of some, but the absence of others who were present during the fourth week. They may be involved in courses requiring term papers. Care is taken to adapt to these changes through individual appointments and by adjustments within the group. It is one of our distinctions, I feel, that the instructor adapts to the needs of the students, not the reverse.

General Goals of Reading Groups

Our task is a manifold one. We hope to extend the range of usable reading rates and to develop the ability to determine appropriate rate or rates for one's reading task. We try to define and shape appropriate study reading skills both for the style of the course and the style of the student. We provide an opportunity for the student to develop awareness of his attitudes, resistances, and points of urgency and their relationship to his reading. We provide the experience of reading material from the point of view of different disciplines in order to see that the way the assignment is framed alters the reading approach. Our central aim is to develop the ability of the student to cope with his university reading demands. An important by-product is the heightened self-esteem he feels about himself generally.

Specific Goals of Three Week Program

We provide experiences in selective reading, accelerated reading, main idea reading, and careful reading. We work to develop skills in perception, visual functioning, word knowledge and comprehension. We enable the student to become more consciously aware of the organizational approach of the writer. We promote the more efficient functioning of the student generally.

Specific Goals of Second Three Weeks of Six Week Program

This time permits greater awareness through additional experience of the differences in reading as determined by the difference in purpose. Through the use of a wide variety of longer articles related in their ideas we focus on associational reading. We can give attention to the study skills that are now seen as necessary for study reading and also offer experiences in critical reading. There is time to develop the reading skills necessary to complete a book in ninety minutes.

Goals of Instructional Procedures for Groups

The instructional procedures we use in groups as distinguished from individual programs establish a group momentum and rhythm of work. They provide an opportunity for sharing a variety of reading experiences with other students. These procedures should encourage an atmosphere of group supportiveness. At the same time the methods used should promote the observation that the work style of individual students relates to their reading style. Opportunities need to be provided for the discussion of the ideas from the readings, and the discussion of individual student reactions to the reading group experience.

Instructional Methods

In order to give meaning to a discussion of our specific instructional methods, I've chosen the question-answer format for my exposition. These are questions asked of us by others and questions we ask ourselves. The answers come from what we do in our reading groups.

How Do You Establish a Group Feeling While Still Accommodating Individual Differences?

The fifteen students sit around a large table with the instructor sitting with the group or walking around the group observing the performance of each student. Certain tasks are done together at the table. Then the students in pairs move to the carrels against the wall where an individual controlled reader is available for each pair. Then all move back to the table for the next group activity.

How Do You Accommodate to Differences in Comprehension Skills?

By going over each student's work after the session we soon see which students have special needs for additional comprehension work. A unit on main ideas, paragraph analysis, key words, inferences, etcetera, is put in that student's folder to be done during one phase of the group activity or at home. The counselor is available for individual appointments for any member of the group throughout the quarter.

How Do You Establish a Group Momentum and Rhythm?

Every reading activity during the ninety minutes is timed by the instructor, with a limit for each. For example, a total of twenty minutes is devoted to exercises in Lyle Miller's Increasing Reading Efficiency, with a specific time for each exercise. Earlier, when we just timed the activity as a whole, we found a wide range in the number of exercises finished.

What Do You Do to Develop Perceptual Skills and Visual Functioning?

We use the individual hand tachistoscope for the first fifteen minutes of each session. Its exercises develop the ability to see words and numbers in a configuration--in a gestalt. An additional value is that they demand close attention and develop concentration.

The Controlled Reader serves the same function. We use the MN series, and begin the group projection during the second session. If that experience shows a wide spread of performance in the group, students are paired according to the similarity of their reading rates and work subsequently on the Junior controlled readers. For those individuals who reach plateaus or are slow readers, we use the High School series of the films.

How Do You Encourage an Awareness of the Organizational Pattern of Writing?

1. The process of Surveying the book as a whole is presented during the second session. The students bring their own textbooks and apply the excellent direction in Paul D. Leedy's Read With Speed and Precision to their books and current chapter.

Our method of presentation of this process has been very successful. The students exchange books with the person next to them, survey the other's book for five minutes and discuss their observations with the owner. The latter then becomes the resource of the effectiveness of the survey and is encouraged to discuss his book and its relationship to his course. Each student then surveys his own chapter and writes a brief summary of it. There are two important side effects of this procedure: one is to establish a relationship between the students and the other is to emphasize that the techniques learned are to be applied to one's own work.

2. Preview skimming is the second way we stress awareness of organization. We find Martha Maxwell's book, Skimming and Scanning Improvement effective for this. Every subsequent article read in the group is first preview skimmed with a time limit.

3. The third aspect of our emphasis on organization is instruction in various organizational patterns of writing. We use various films in the MN Controlled Reader Series to illustrate specific patterns. Subsequent articles read by the group are selected to illustrate other patterns.

What Do You Do To Promote Rapid Reading?

Four methods of hand pacing are introduced and practiced. Each reading task presented is to be hand paced with whichever method the student chooses to use. We feel the emphasis on hand pacing is vital in the transfer of the rate achieved on the Controlled Reader to the regular reading task.

What Study Reading Skills Do You Present?

The technique of delayed underlining, question-answer outlining, marginal notations, summarizing, and recall patterns are the principal study reading skills we present.

Our approach to the reading program for U.C.L.A. students is a multi-pronged one. From the beginning we make clear that we are sharing all of the techniques and experiences we have. Students must then select the ones that work for them. It may well be that it is this atmosphere and attitude of sharing and the opportunity for choice that is our best method of instruction.